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Guidelines for Developing An All Hazards Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan for Businesses

I. Purpose

Emergencies are unplanned events that can cause significant injury, or even death, to employees, customers, or the public, disrupt or close down operations, cause physical or environmental damage, or harm the organization's public image. The changing threat paradigm and recent emergencies, including acts of nature, technological emergencies, civil disturbances, and terrorist incidents have shifted public awareness, most importantly, business owners and managers, to the need for an all hazards emergency plan or continuity of operations (COOP) plan.

A COOP plan addresses emergencies from an all hazards approach.   The COOP plan is designed to establish policy and guidance to ensure the execution of mission essential functions and to direct the relocation of personnel and resources to an alternate facility capable of supporting operations. The plan should develop procedures for alerting, notifying, activating and deploying employees; identify mission essential functions; establish an alternate facility; and roster personnel with authority and knowledge of functions.

This document is intended to be a guideline for developing a COOP plan. It is strictly a template to guide one through the steps needed to begin the process of developing a comprehensive COOP plan for the organization.

II. Scope

Establishing a COOP planning committee is a good way to begin the process of ensuring continuity of operations for any organization. Senior management should be represented or readily accessible since the authority for many of the decisions will need to come from the governing body of the organization. One person should be designated as having overall responsibility for compiling and maintaining the plan with input from the committee. Sections may be delegated, but one person should plan meetings, establish deadlines for documents, act as liaison when necessary, and compile the necessary components of the plan.

Each COOP plan will vary by organization; however, the following components should be included in any plan:

- Purpose, scope, and authority *(why are you developing this plan, what does it cover, and on whose authority can its functions be carried out?)*
- Concept of Operations
    - Key Staff *(who has decision-making authority, access to critical areas, knowledge of critical functions?)*
    - Mission Essential Functions *(organizational functions that enable vital services or economics to continue in an emergency)*
    - Direction and Control *(who's in charge, what system is in place to manage resources, analyze information, and make decisions?)*

- o Alert and Notification *(how will essential and non-essential staff be notified or recalled, on-duty and during off-duty hours?)*
- Responsibilities and Procedures *(who is responsible for what and when, how will those responsibilities be carried out?)*
- Outline Phases of COOP: Activation, Alternate Operations, and Reconstitution and Termination *(action steps for each of the areas listed*: who*, what, where, when, and how will activation of the COOP plan occur; how will operations transition back to non-emergency status?)*
- Annexes with detailed information on each of the essential components *(the "how to" steps to carry out the functions of the key components)*

III. Core Components of Plan (many of these will be a separate annex in the plan)

1. Plans and Procedures
2. Mission Essential Functions
3. Delegations of Authority
4. Orders of Succession
5. Alternate Facilities
6. Interoperable Communications
7. Vital Records and Databases
8. Logistics and Administration
9. Personnel Issues and Coordination
10. Security
11. Testing, Training and Exercising
12. Program Management

1. Plans and Procedures

1a. Name/position of staff responsible for developing COOP plan:_____

Contact number(s):_____

Each agency should develop plans and procedures or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) specific the to overall organizational mission. The following components should be included in the COOP plans and procedures:

- Delineation of mission essential functions
- A decision-making process for activation of the COOP plan
- An up to date staff roster
- Procedures to ensure readiness – on-duty and off-duty hours, with and without warning of an incident
- Provisions for personnel accountability
- Reliable processes to acquire additional resources to sustain operations for 30 days

- Provisions for attaining operational capability within 12 hours of activation
- Constraints derived from the planning committee such as unique operational issues or technology, personnel factors, or resource limitations which affect the COOP plan
- Mechanisms for implementation in accordance with the magnitude of the incident

2. Mission Essential Functions

Identifying mission essential functions is the foundation from which all other components of the plan are developed and is often the most difficult. Any mission not deemed to be essential should be deferred until additional personnel and/or resources become available.

- Compile all organizational functions
- Determine criteria for selecting critical activities

2a. List the mission essential functions (*those functions necessary to continue to provide vital services and sustain an economic base during an emergency*):_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2b. Prioritize those functions:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

- Roster personnel to complete those functions based on skills and knowledge
- Assess alternate facility capacity based on functions and rosters

2c. List required resources and equipment:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Delegations of Authority

Each agency should identify those who are delegated authority are prepared to perform emergency duties, then document which authorities can and should be delegated, to whom, under what circumstances, including when delegation becomes effective and when it terminates, and any limitations.

3a. Individual(s) delegated authority (specific which authority):_____

_____

3b. By whom:_____

3c. Under what circumstances:_____

_____

3d. Limitations to authority:_____

_____

_____

4. Orders of Succession

Each agency should identify orders of succession for agency heads and other key leaders and ensure that those identified are prepared to perform emergency duties.
- Orders of succession for the position of agency head should include:
  - Conditions for succession
  - Notification method
  - Time, geographical, and organizational limitations
- Use titles or positions rather than persons
- Establish succession for key positions at headquarters and regional locations
- Revise and distribute orders of succession as necessary

4a. Location of Orders of Succession:_____
4b. Name of individual(s)/position(s) with access to Orders:_____

_____

_____

4c. Contact number(s):_____
_____

5. Alternate Facilities

The COOP plan should designate an alternate operating facility with sufficient space, equipment, infrastructure systems, and logistical support to maintain operations for up to 30 days. Physical security and personnel access control measures should be taken into account. Agencies should consider pre-positioning minimum essential equipment at the alternate facility. Consider cooperative or mutual aid agreements with other agencies and/or virtual office technologies.

5a. Name of alternate facility:_____
Contact person:_____Number:_____
Alternate numbers:_____
Complete address:_____
5b. Equipment on-site:_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5c. Cooperative or mutual aid agreement signed: Yes   No   N/A

6. Interoperable Communications

Communications capabilities should be consistent with the organization's operations and provide for access to other data and systems required to conduct mission essential functions. Consideration should be given to the full spectrum of technological advances now available: landlines, cellular, satellite, wireless, etc. Redundancy of communications is vital and should be developed to the depth necessary to sustain operations.

6a. Identify the data and communications systems needed to support mission essential functions:

    1.
    2.
    3.
    4.
    5.
    6.
    7.
    8.
    9.
    10.

7. Vital Records and Databases

The COOP plan should account for the identification and protection of vital records and databases at the primary and alternate facilities. To the extent possible, agencies should provide for off-site storage of duplicate records, off-site back up or electronic records and databases, and pre-positioning of vital records and databases at the alternate facility.

- Identify vital records, systems, electronic and hard copy data critical to organizational functions.
- Include: emergency operating plans and directives, delegations of authority, orders of succession, and staffing
- Legal, financial, personnel, and payroll records; insurance policies, vendor contracts, etc.
- Develop procedures for documenting operations when the COOP plan is activated

7a. Address of off-site records storage facility:_____

_____

7b. Back-up mechanisms for vital records:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Logistics and Administration

Agencies should determine to what level they can self-sustain their emergency operations and then develop procedures to acquire services, personnel, resources, and equipment necessary to perform mission essential functions. Mutual aid should be considered if applicable. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) should be established with any entities that may be utilized.

- Identify, pre-position and maintain equipment/resources needed at alternate site
- Provide for telecommunications and information technology (IT) support at alternate facility
- Establish provisions for personnel (parking, dining facilities, etc.) at alternate site
- Develop and maintain site-support procedures which clearly state the process and responsibility for receiving, supporting, and relocating personnel and equipment at the alternate site

8a. Name(s)/position(s) of site-support staff:_____

_____

Contact number(s):
8b. Name of IT support personnel/company:

Contact number(s):

9. Personnel Issues and Coordination

- Develop a communications plan to disseminate information to essential and non-essential personnel
- Address the health, safety, and emotional well-being of employees and their families
- Assure personal preparedness for staff through training and education; encourage staff to develop personal preparedness plans and kits for themselves and their families
- Address pay status, leave time, and potential lay-offs
- Address medical, special needs, and travel issues of staff

9a. Name(s)/position(s) of staff responsible for maintaining communications plan:

9b. Name(s)/position(s) of staff responsible for employee preparedness training:

10. Security

While a COOP plan is not considered a classified document, it does contain sensitive information and its handling and distribution should be controlled and limited, both electronically and in hard copy. Agencies should consider using Chapter No. 2001-361, FL Law (formerly Senate Bill 16-C) to provide a public records exemption for their plans.

- Address physical security of current and alternate facilities
- Address communications security
- Enact personnel access controls for employees and customers
- Be prepared to augment all levels of security (physical, operational, cyber, and access) based upon the emergency or threat

11. Testing, Training, and Exercising

Agencies should consider developing a comprehensive testing, training, and exercise program to evaluate policies and procedures, ensure that personnel are properly trained, and verify that resources and equipment are capable of supporting operations. Each element of the COOP plan should be evaluated

through exercises and a procedure established to remedy any deficiencies in the plans.

At a minimum, agencies should:

- Conduct orientation and training for COOP planning committee members
- Periodically test alert and notification procedures; update rosters and notification checklists
- Exercise operational plans, alternate facilities, and interoperable communications; plan joint agency exercises
- Develop a schedule to evaluate and test equipment
- Develop a remedial action plan with timelines for completion of assigned tasks
- Update plans and procedures as necessary or on an annual basis

11a. Exercise program and schedule developed: Yes   No
11b. Notification checklists and rosters updated regularly: Yes   No

12. Program Management

Agencies should prepare a strategic, long-range planning process that includes anticipated funding requirements. The plan should define organizational vision, mission statement, goals and objectives of the program. The plan should identify a current inventory of internal and external resources, resource shortfalls, steps to overcome them, and operation and maintenance costs. Costs should include program dollars as well as labor costs.

- Develop a coordinated program management process to ensure maintenance, operation, and funding for a viable COOP capability
- Update the plan as necessary

IV. Plan Execution

It is imperative for an agency to make the distinction between a situation requiring a building evacuation only and one necessitating activation of its COOP plan. A sudden emergency such as a fire or hazardous materials incident may require the agency to evacuate the building, but the short duration would not automatically require the activation of its COOP plan. However, an emergency that renders the facility unusable for an extended time period, affecting normal operations, may require an agency to activate its COOP plan.

Agencies should develop an effective executive decision-making process to determine the most prudent course of action for response and recovery efforts.

This document was compiled with information from the Florida Department of Community Affairs Division of Emergency Management, *Continuity of Operations: Elements of Viability* course and workbook. Additional information on COOP planning can be found at the following sources:

American Red Cross: *Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry*

National Fire Protection Association – NFPA 1600: *Standard on Disaster Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs*, 2000 Edition